



AMERICAN MARKETING
ASSOCIATION

2018 AMA Summer Academic Conference

Big Ideas and New Methods in Marketing

August 10-12, 2018 | Boston, MA



PROCEEDINGS

Volume 29

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Can Interactive Music Drive Your Online Shopping Cart? An Experimental Study of Consumer Engagement and Behavioral Intention

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Keywords: *interactivity, interactive music, user engagement, behavioral intention, e-commerce*

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The study investigates the potential of applying interactive music to the design of e-commerce website in order to create more engaging consumer experience. Interactive music refers to a category of audio media where specific actions of a user lead to an alteration in the medium per se (Deweppe et al., 2015). On one hand, by integrating music to the presentation of interactivity, the degree of vividness is elevated, which produces positive effects on user engagement (Sheng and Joginapelly, 2012). On the other hand, by adding interactive features to the use of music, interactivity can also contribute to positive emotional reactions by enriching the sense of control and pleasure for its users (Koo and Lee, 2011). Therefore, the study posits that interactive music, compared to the use of static background music, will have a significant effect on user engagement that leads to greater behavioral intention and more positive evaluation toward the website and its brand. Additionally, the research examined whether four selected antecedents—existing attitude, Internet usage, price and web features as purchase decision-making factors—moderate the effects of interactive music on consumers' behavioral intention and perception.

Method and Data Used

The study created an e-commerce website and experimented a common technique of interactive music, soundtrack layering (Fraser and Bradford, 2013), through a single-factor experiment with three conditions (the control condition

without background music, the static background music condition, the interactive background music condition). Self-report questionnaires (N = 251) were used to collect behavioral and attitudinal data, including (1) a manipulation check measuring participants' perceived interactivity and emotional arousal, (2) mediating variables: vividness, cognitive and affective engagement, (3) dependent variables: evaluation of web features, attitude toward the site, behavioral intention, customer share, and retail preference, (4) moderating variables: existing attitude toward online shopping, frequency of Internet usage, the importance of price and web features as purchase decision-making factor.

Summary of Findings

We found that consumers in the interactive music condition were more affectively engaged in the shopping task, perceiving the website more novel due to a higher level of perceived vividness. The enhanced engagement led to more positive brand attitudes and increased users' behavioral intention to purchase. Additionally, interactive music also influenced online consumers through interaction effects with three moderators: (1) The more positive attitude consumers held toward online shopping in general, the more positive outcomes interactive music produced on their perception and behavioral intention. (2) The positive response toward interactive music also increased as the importance of price factor in decision-making raised, (3) and as the importance of web design factor in decision-making decreased.

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Key Contributions

Theory-wise, findings of the present study contribute to revealing the key mechanism by which interactivity of e-commerce websites creates more engaging shopping experiences for consumers. The consumer perception that they have control over the aesthetic aspect of their shopping experience – the background music – leads to greater consumer engagement. Interacting with the background music while shopping online is perceived to be something new and pleasant, and this positive experience enhances their brand attitudes and even behavioral intentions, even when all the other aspects of the website remained the same across three conditions. Furthermore, the moderating effect of price and web features as purchase decision-making factors provided additional insights to the function of interactive music as a heuristic cue (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and resonated with the Dual-Process Model of Interactivity Effects that interactivity can influence its audience through different pathways (Liu and Shrum, 2009). On one side, the experiment provided a low-involvement condition for price-oriented consumers; hence, the presence of interactive music created a pleasant merchandising environment and elicited positive emotional and attitudinal reactions. Conversely, customers who are attentive to design of an e-platform were likely to be in the central route of processing. Thus, interactive music

served as an additional factor for them to evaluate, which did not necessarily result in positive evaluations.

From a practical perspective, findings in respect to the interactive music's positive impact on enhancing perceived novelty are meaningful under the context of new media, website interactivity and their application in digital marketing communication (Hwang and Seo, 2016). Findings of the present studies not only revealed potential of applying interactive music to the design of online sale platforms but also provided significant marketing implications. First, given that interactive music is particularly impactful on eliciting perceived novelty, marketers should strategize to approach consumers who are more attentive to the experiential values of online shopping. Second, given that interactive music is effective in enhancing affective engagement through vividness, online stores of product types that need creative and rich visuals are more likely to see positive impact of the media format. Lastly, consumers' current perception, e-purchase amount and frequency, and preference of online shopping over brick-and-mortar stores can be a guideline for market research, as their existing attitude is a strong predictor of positive responses to interactive music.

References are available on request.